

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness Matthew 5:6

All of us understands the concept of hunger. I tend to be hypoglycemic and that can create some interesting situations. I had an occasion this summer to play golf on a Friday. I was rushed all morning and was later than usual getting to the golf course. Consequently, I did not eat lunch I just teed off. It was a warm day and sweating just compounded the problem that came up. I started shaking a little on the third hole. I recognized the symptom but thought I could make it to the clubhouse after the 9th hole. I was wrong, I could not finish the third hole. My body was DEMANDING FOOD or else shake even more.

Thirst operates the same way. When you are thirsty you can hardly think of anything else. Your mind becomes consumed with needing water to drink. There is nothing better than a cold Diet Pepsi when you are truly thirsty. Hunger and thirst can become so great that you cannot ignore the need. When our hunger and thirst kick in, we stop what we're doing and we quench our thirst and fill our hunger.

In the world of sports, we hear that a team is "Hungry" for a championship. Hunger is used as a metaphor for strong desire. The idea is that of a driving pursuit and a passion that comes from deep within the person. Another word that may help us understand the idea is ambition.

Hunger and Thirst

Listen to the words of Jesus as he continues to teach the crowds that have come to hear him on the mountain. ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*** (Matthew 5:6 ESV)

Hungering and thirsting is not a mild desire. To say that you are hungry for something does not mean that you do not really care if you have it or not. To say that you are thirsting for something does not mean that you are presently content or satisfied. Hungering and thirsting speak to having a deep craving. The scriptures speak of having this hunger and thirst in several places.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1–2 ESV)

Like a deer panting and thirsting for flowing streams of water is the thirst that David has for the living God. Listen to David again:

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1 ESV)

David does not speak of being mildly interested in God. He earnestly seeks the Lord. His soul thirsts for the Lord. His flesh faints for the Lord. Do you hear the passion? Do you hear the desire dripping from his words? Now let's turn our attention back to Matthew 5:6 and notice what Jesus says those who belong to his kingdom hunger and thirst for.

For Righteousness

Notice that Jesus says that our passionate pursuit is not simply for the Lord but for righteousness. Righteousness is used a few different ways in the scriptures. When we read the writings of the apostle Paul, righteousness refers to the idea of justification. Paul will often write about how we are not righteous, but God makes us righteous through the cross of Jesus. Justification is the word that we typically use to describe this. Is Jesus saying that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the people who desire to be justified by God? While we could argue that this is true, in Matthew's gospel the word righteousness is never used in this way like Paul uses it. To see how Matthew uses the word righteousness in his gospel, we can look a few sentences down the page and understand the meaning. Look further into the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10 ESV)

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20 ESV)

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1 ESV)

We will examine the meaning of these teachings in later lessons. For now, it is enough for us to see that Matthew is not using righteousness in these places to describe God justifying us or declaring us righteous. Rather, righteousness is used in Matthew's gospel in terms of personal righteousness by doing God's will.

God's people are those who passionately desire to do God's will and pursue to keep God's requirements. They look at God's laws and ways as spiritual necessities to be desired just as food and drink are physical necessities for physical life. Conforming to God's will is their highest desire. The character of God's people is that they long so much for a godly life and relationship with God as much as a starving person longs for his next meal or a parched tongue longs for drops of water. God's people are desperate for the things of God. All that we desire is to be right with our God.

It is interesting and sad to note how modern Christianity seems to have no concern for right living or holiness. Right living appears to be inconsequential these days. People think that they are Christians or that they serve the Lord while their desires are for any and everything else but God. Their desire for God is mild curiosity and not a burning passion or raging hunger. We cannot permit any thought that a mild interest in God is what Jesus is calling for. Listen to what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well.

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10 ESV)

Just slow down over those words, ***“If you knew the gift of God” and if you knew who is speaking to you, you would have asked him for the drink and received living water.*** Those who know the gift of God and know who Jesus is and what he offers hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Right living becomes as important as food and drink. These are those who cannot get enough of God's word. They see their relationship with God as Isaiah pictured it: the eating of rich food Isa 55:1.

Satisfied

Looking for satisfaction is a priority for most in our culture. Magazine headlines and television advertisements promise that what they offer will truly satisfy you. Everyone wants to be satisfied so we are sometimes willing to settle for lesser things. The prophet Jeremiah pictured this problem in the second chapter where the people are described as having broken cisterns that do not hold water. The reason it is so foolish is because God is offering flowing, clean, clear water. Yet we try to drink old, stale water thinking we will be satisfied in this way. Therefore, the scriptures so often tell us to be godly and pursue righteousness and holiness. Satisfaction will only come through such a lifestyle. Those in the kingdom understand that satisfaction in this life is found only in Christ. Listen to Jesus again:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Jn 6:35

The more we allow God alone to satisfy, the more we become dissatisfied with substitutes. For the person who understands what Jesus accomplished in His death, burial and resurrection, the more the more they will hunger for God. This pursuit of righteousness destroys self-righteousness because this pursuit reinforces our poverty of spirit, insufficiency, and our need for repentance.

What Jesus says should challenge us to ask ourselves what we hunger and thirst for. Salvation comes only to those who truly and deeply want it. Our spiritual poverty and mourning over our sins should compel us to desire salvation, restoration, reconciliation, and righteousness. Those who hunger for God desire to conform to the will of God.

Let's look at this another way. It might make us a little uncomfortable it might help us get Jesus' message. Jesus is calling for religious fanaticism. We are fanatical about eating and drinking.

We never miss meals and we are very regimented in our eating and drinking throughout the day. All these passages tell us that Jesus is to be our food and drink. We should want Jesus and not want any substitute. We want time with him and nothing can dissuade us from this passionate pursuit of our Lord. Jesus is on our minds like food and drink when we hunger and thirst. We are called to be consumed with Jesus and desire his ways in our lives.

So, it comes down to this:

What is your passionate pursuit in life?

What satisfies you?

What do you hunger and thirst for?

One way we can judge is to examine where our time and money are expended.

I can say with absolute certainty that in this life only Jesus can satisfy.

So, give your life to him today.